

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PRESS REACTION TO DEFENSE MINISTER RICHARDSON'S SPEECH

REF: OTTAWA 204

1. SUMMARY. HEAVY PRESS REACTION TO DEFENSE MINISTER RICHARDSON'S ADDRESS ON DEFENSE POLICY (REFTEL) HAS GENERALLY REFLECTED VIEW THAT MAJOR DECISIONS ON DEFENSE EXPENDITURES STILL TO BE MADE AND THAT WHILE THE MOVE AWAY FROM TOTAL UNIFICATION OF THE ARMED FORCES IS WELCOME, CANADIAN FORCES REMAIN IN QUESTIONABLE STATE OF READINESS TO UNDERTAKE ROLES ASSIGNED THEM. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESS REACTION TO DEFMIN RICHARDSON'S MAJOR DEFENSE POLICY ADDRESS ON JANUARY 17 HAS BEEN HEAVY AND HAS RANGED FROM REFLECTING A WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE TO A POSITION OF OUTSPOKEN CRITICISM.

2. TORONTO GLOBE & MAIL IN EDITORIAL ON JANUARY 22 EXPRESSED MORE MODERATE VIEW. AFTER PRAISING RICHARDSON'S DECISION TO MOVE AWAY FROM TOTAL UNIFICATION OF THE ARMED FORCES, EDITORIAL ALSO GIVES HIM CREDIT "FOR PERSUADING CABINET TO INCREASE THE FUNDS AVAILABLE TO THE SERVICES... THERE WILL BE INCREASES OF APPROXIMATELY 11-12 PERCENT

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DURING THE CURRENT YEAR AND NEXT YEAR. THIS WILL REQUIRE

A CUTBACK IN FLYING AND SAILING OPERATION... MANPOWER WILL BE HELD AT ITS PRESENT 78,000 MEN..." HOWEVER, AFTER COMMENTING THAT "MR. RICHARDSON AND GENERAL DEXTRAZE (CHIEF OF STAFF) ARE NOW A GREAT DEAL CLOSER IN THEIR VIEWS..." GLOBE& MAIL GOES ON TO SAY "CANADIANS GENERALLY HAVE REVIVED AN INTEREST IN DEFENSE BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN FORCED, BY THE OIL CRISIS, TO RECOGNIZE HOW UNDEFENDED MUCH OF THEIR COUNTRY IS... SOVEREIGNTY DEMANDS A VIABLE DEFENSE." EDITORIAL CONCLUDES BY SAYING "MR. RICHARDSON WITH THE HELP OF CANADIANS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE FORCES HAS BROUGHT THE CABINET A CONSIDERABLE DISTANCE. WE HOPE HE WILL GO FULL SPEED AHED FROM THIS SOUND BEGINNING."

3. THE OTTAWA CITIZEN AND THE FINANCIAL POST HAVE TAKEN A MIDDLE GROUND IN THEIR CRITICISM. THE OTTAWA CITIZEN IN JANARY 21 EDITORIAL FOCUSES PRIMARILY ON THE FACT THAT "THE SPEECH LEAVES TO MANY UNANSWEED QUESTIONS." IT PRAISES RICHARDSON'S OBJECTIVES TO INCREASE EFFICIENCY AND LOWER COSTS BUT URGES FURTHER DEFINITION OF WHAT IS IN STORE FOR THE DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT. IN A NEWS ITEM ON THE SAME DAY, THE CITIZEN ALSO PROMINENTLY REPORTED RICHARDSON'S APPARENT HOPES THAT "EMPLOYERS WILL AGREE TO GIVE WORKERS MILITIA TRAININ TIME" (PRESS REPORTS WOULD INDICATE THAT RICHARDSON INTENDS TO CONTINE TO PUSH FOR A BETTER RESERVE FORCE AS STATED IN HIS SPEECH). COLUMIST CLIVE BAXTER IN THE FINANCIAL POST COMMENTS THAT "DESPITE ITS CONCERN ABOUT INFLATION,THE FEDERAL CABINET PLANS TO PUSH DEFENSE SPENDING UP AGAIN NEXT YEAR." BAXTER SEES THIS AS HAVING A POSITIVE EFFECT ON THE ECONOMY SINCE "IT COULD MEAN MORE (DEFENSE) CONTRACTS THAN (MANY COMPANIES) HAD DARED HOPE." HOWEVER, HE CONCLUDES THAT IN REALITY "MILITARY PLANNERSCOULD BE HARD PRESSED TO AVOID CUTS" AND RAISES THE POSSIBILTIIY THAT CANADA MIGHT HAVE TO DISBAND IT'S GROUND AND AIR FORCES IN EUROPE AND CLOSE DOWN MORE MILITARY BASES IN CANADA.

4. CRITICAL ATTITUDES IN THE PRESS WERE MORE COMMON. TYPICALLY, THE MONTREAL GAZETTE ON JANUARY 21 EDITORIALIZED THAT RICHARDSON "HAS PRODUCED A FEW UNCLASSIFIED

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ORGANIZATIONAL AND BUDGETARY LOLLIPOPS TO SWEETEN THE DEFENSE LOBBY... BUT HAS DONE ALMOST NOTHING TO MAKE CANADIAN DEFENSE POLICY COHERENT TO THE CANADIAN PUBLIC...THE BULK OF THE MINISTER'S PRESENTATION... DISCLOSES LITTLE ABOUT DEFENSE PRIORITIES... THE DEPARTMENT WILL STTILL BE CONSTRAINED TO PERFORM MOST OF ITS TASKS INEFFECTIVELY... EVEN AS AMERICANS DISCUSS MOVING SUPERTANKERS THROUGH THE NORTHWEST PASSAGE UNDER

U.S. COAST GUARD ESCORT, THE MINISTER HAS NOTHING TO ANNOUNCE ABOUT CANADIAN CAPABILITY IN THE NORTH." EDITORIAL CONCLUDES IT WAS A POLICY ANNOUNCEMENT DEVOID OF POLICIES ON THE MAJOR ISSUES OF CANADIAN DEFENSE.

5. OTTAWA JOURNAL ON SAME DAY STATED "JAMES RICHARDSON SUCCEEDED IN MAINTAINING HIS NONIMPRESSIVE REPUTATION OF MINISTER OF DEFENSE." EDITORIAL POINTS OUT THAT "WHAT HE DIDN'T TALK ABOUT IS MORE TO THE POINT" AND GOES ON TO CITE CANADA'S AIRCRAFT AND TANK CORPS NEEDS.

6. TORONTO STAR COLUMNIST RICHARD GWYN COMMENTS THAT "RICHARDSON'S PROBLEM NOW IS THAT NEITHER HE NOR THE GOVERNMENT HAS A WORKABLE DEFENSE POLICY... CANADA HAS NEITHER THE MONEY NOR THE POLITICAL WILL TO FULFILL (DEFENSE) ROLES ADEQUATELY." OTTAWA CITIZEN COLUMNIST CHARLES LYNCH STATES THAT THE "ARMED FORCES ARE STRETCHED DANGEROUSLY THIN FOR THE TASKS ASSIGNED TO THEM, AND THERE IS EVERY INDICATION THEY WILL BE EVEN THINNER BY THE END OF 1975... MR. RICHARDSON THREW THE FORCES SEVERAL BONES LAST WEEK BUT THERE WASN'T MUCH MEAT ON THEM." LYNCH REVIEWS CANADIAN EQUIPMENT NEEDS, PARTICULARLY IN AIR FORCE, AND THEN CONCLUDES THAT RICHARDSON'S POSITION "MAKES EXCELLENT SENSE IN THE CONTEXT OF RESTRAINT ON GOVERNMENT SPENDING, BUT MAY MAKE NO SENSE AT ALL IN TERMS OF EFFICIENCY OR CREDIBILITY OF OUR ARMED FORCES." ONE POSITIVE HOPE THAT LYNCH EXPRESSES IS THAT PERHAPS RICHARDSON "CAN COVER HIS LOSSES BY PUTTING INCREASED EMPHASIS ON THE MILITIA, ASSIGNING TO THE RESERVE FORCES SOME OF THE TASKS HITHERTO PERFORMED BY THE FULL-TIME FORCES." PORTER

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